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ABSTRACT

Teachers are challenged by contradictory demands on curricular time. The social needs children bring to school sometimes collide with basic literacy instruction priorities. This research addressed concerns about television violence via a project that encouraged children to log their television viewing and write in daily journals their perceptions of those viewing experiences. The goal was to integrate social content issues of educational concern with the academic demands of teachers to enhance the writing competency of their pupils. The study participants were 70 students from grade 6 who were asked to respond to 8 questionnaire items on their attitudes toward violence on television. Results indicate that heavy viewers reported more favorable attitudes toward television violence, and boys had higher percentages of positive or neutral evaluations of violent content than girls. Results also show lower than expected viewing rates and that journal entries involved more discussion of comedy and sports than any other topic, including violence. Using children's out-of-school interests as the content for in-school literacy instruction was found to be an effective way to reconcile two potentially conflicting educational priorities. (SD)

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BRINGING BART SIMPSON TO SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Teachers are challenged by contradictory demands on curricular time. The social needs children bring to school sometimes collide with basic literacy instruction priorities. This research addressed concerns about television violence via a project which encouraged children to log their TV viewing, and write in daily journals their perceptions of those viewing experiences. Heavy viewers reported more favourable attitudes toward television violence, and children writing in journals about TV wrote more, and were more interested in the writing assignments than those writing on self-selected topics. Using children's out-of-school interests as the content for in-school literacy instruction was found an effective way to console two potentially conflicting educational priorities.

Poster presented at XXVI International Congress of Psychology, Montreal, August, 1996. **Correspondence: Catherine Ann Cameron, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, N.B., E3B 6E4, Canada. E-mail: cameron@unb.ca**

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INTRODUCTION

Great concern is expressed in schools today about the influence of media violence on children (Martinez, 1992). Exposure to violence on television has led to children's imitation of this (Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988), and heavier viewing of violent programming has been related to children's later displays of aggression (Signorielli, 1991). Critical television viewing curricula have been demonstrated to give children more realistic ideas about television (Watkins, Sprafkin, & Gadow, 1988).

Added to these social challenges in education, many recent reports on the literacy accomplishments of students today are less than encouraging about their reading and writing proficiency (Applebee, Langer, Jenkins, Mullis, & Foertsch 1990).

Pressures on curricular time has impelled educators to examine ways to integrate efforts to address societal impacts on students, while at the same time, to focus attention on children's basic academic skill development. Perkins (1990) proposed the benefits of teachers' enhancing students' writing using "response journals."

The present study examines the television viewing attitudes and practices of students, and the effectiveness of engaging in journal writing in response to what they have viewed. The goal was to integrate social content issues of educational concern with the academic demands on teachers to enhance the writing competency of their pupils.

METHOD

Participants were 70 students (36 boys [X age: 11 years, 9.1 months] and 34 girls [X age: 11 years, 7.7 months]) from three Grade 6 classes in schools in a small capital city in eastern Canada.

The students were asked to respond to eight questionnaire items (Table 1) on their attitudes toward violence

on television. They also filled out daily logs of their television viewing. The students were then asked to write journal entries on a daily basis for one month. One class wrote on self-selected topics. The second class wrote about their television viewing. The third group also wrote about television, but the experimenter exchanged brief written messages with the students in that class, asking for clarifications, elaborations, and the like, on the opinions they expressed.

Table 1. *ATTITUDES TOWARD MEDIA VIOLENCE*

Some of my favourite actors are Sylvester Stallone, Arthur Schwarz-enegger and Jean-Claude Van Damne.

I do not like to watch movies like *Rambo*, or *The Terminator.*

It bothers me to watch shows containing violence.

Shows like *Littlest Hobo* and *Road to Avonlea* are favourites of mine.

It doesn't really matter if people hurt each other on television because it's only make-believe.

It does not bother me when I see a person being hurt on television.

When I see people fighting on television I wish they would stop.

I do not enjoy watching fights on television.

RESULTS

The overall mean number of hours spent watching television per day was 2.38 hours. Students were classified as "low," "medium," or "high" viewers using the 33rd and 66th percentiles as cut-off points.

The content of the students' writing was analyzed based on the type of programming written about, central

themes, and evaluations of what was viewed. The "top" television shows written about were: *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, Full House,* and *The Olympics* (which were taking place during the time of the study). Writing was classified according to the central themes presented. Major themes were: comedy (reflecting the sit-com/family show preferences of these students) and sports (representing their interest in the Olympics).

Boys differed from girls in their evaluations of violent content in their journals($H_2(2) = 9.9$; $p < .05$, and boys had more favourable attitudes toward media violence as assessed by the questionnaire at both pre- and post-test ($r = -.45$, and $-.48$ respectively).

Viewing time also related to evaluations of violence, with percentage of positive evaluations at 53% for high frequency viewers, and 19% for low frequency viewers ($H_2(1) = 5.5$; $p < .05$).

Internal consistency of the eight questionnaire items related to *Attitudes Toward Media Violence*, using Chronbach's Alpha was good at .82, and test-retest reliability based on control sample performance was adequate (.68).

The effects of the different writing interventions yielded no questionnaire response differences at post-test.

DISCUSSION

The amount of time the present participants reported watching TV (less than 3 hours/day) is low in comparison with reports of average children's viewing times in the literature (closer to 4 hours per day). This could have been due to inaccuracies of reportage, the warm (spring) season of the year, the potential "burden" of having to write about what they saw, or the fact that these Canadian children simply watched less television.

Consistent with previous findings, boys and girls were found to differ in evaluations of violent content in their writing. The boys had higher percentages of positive and neutral evaluations of violent content, while girls had higher percentages of negative evaluations of violence. In general, however, and in line with their low reported viewing rates, the themes addressed in the students' writing involved comedy and sports more frequently than any other theme, including violence.

The effects of simply writing in a journal about their television viewing did not effectively alter the children's perceptions of the violence they witnessed on the screen. This finding is in line with evidence that effective interventions require proactive co-viewing on the part of significant adults in a child's life. Parents who co-view and actively comment on television content have been shown effectively to mediate excessive television viewers' evaluations of what they see on TV (Singer, Singer, Desmond, Hirsch, & Nichol, 1988).

Future interventions might involve more extensive dialogues between teacher and students, ones in which the perceptions, values and attitudes are questioned, probed and challenged. Writing with an interested, engaged reader in mind (Cameron, Hunt, & Linton,1996), has been shown to elicit sophisticated problem-solving. It would be interesting to determine whether such an interchange would effect attitudes, and values changes as well. Such interactions might be seen as engaging children in their zones of proximal development, and ensuring that what they write about has social value to them as well as literacy value to their teachers.

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Patrait Games

I liked Patrait Games. I think Ford did a good job acting. It was a little hard to follow at some parts, but if you watch it again you will under stand it better. My favorite character was Mike When his friends broke him out of prson he tried to kill their family and him. I liked how they talked. The bad guys had Irish acksents They had lots of automatic machine guns and they went and did a drive by shooting. That was my favortite part when they tried to kill Ryan's wife. I liked how they blew up her Porsh with millons of bullits. This could really happen in real life, naby even in the same place with I.R.A and England.

* You said yar favorite part was when they blew up the Porsche. What is it about that part that makes it yar favorite?

It was my favorite part. because the pulled out uzzys and shot it, and it made a big explosion, and I like thing getting blown up.

Sewing

I loove to sew! Sewing is my favorite hobby! I make all sorts of different things like shorts, skirts, dolls, little things to hang in my room, and I make lap quilts. I used to be in a sewing class but I stopped after Christmas! My best friend Jessica and I always sew together! We also make bag type purses! They don't take long to make and we love to make them! It takes us about twenty minutes to make a middle size bag and we half to line it and quilt it, we also have to put a draw-string in it! Jessica and I are going to put up a stand in the mall in the October craft sale and call it crafts for kids! It is going to be soo much fun. Just about all the things I make I give to my mom or my cousin. I crosstich and I've started to make wooden spool dolls! I'm really lucky to have my best friend liking the same hobby as me!